COLLECTIVE/INDIVIDUAL:

In the social sciences there are those sciences that begin from the individual and there are those that begin from society and they tend to have very different views. So sociology for instance begins from society, it assumes the existence of a society and sometimes tries to find a place for the individual in society. Psychology begins with the individual, it assumes the individual exists and sometimes it tries to find space for society amongst individuals.

There was a famous interview with Noam Chomsky, the linguist (printed in a BBC journal called The Listener – it doesn't exist anymore), where he made the point that the Americans and the Russians would never be able to discuss things like freedom because the word meant something completely different to them. So for the Americans freedom means freedom to be yourself and do what you want supported by the state. And for the Russians it means something like freedom to serve the state. So in one case the state is put before the individual and in another case the individual before the state. So this is like psychology and sociology in my earlier characterization.

For all sorts of reasons, but lets just say for ethical reasons, I'm interested in individual freedom and I'm not really very much interested in society at all. I live in a society and occasionally I think some things about society. I think for instance that education is getting worse and worse and is damaging people in general. But I am interested in the individual and in the freedom of the individual and I tend to forget about society. Many people place society above the individual and see the origin of the individual in society and not the other way round, but this is not how I see it.

CONTROL:

I cannot imagine a group of people who could work together without some power structure. I cannot imagine that we can all be equal and act in that way. I can tell you of one social phenomenon which works that way and which has worked that way with extraordinary success for 80 years. And I've in fact just written about it. It is the only truly anarchic organization I know – anarchic not in the sense of Kropotkin and people like that for whom it was an activist form of socialism but in the meaning of the Greek origin of the word 'without rule', 'without governance'. And that is alcoholics anonymous. Alcoholics anonymous has developed a way of existing without anyone having power at all. And it exists as a society—people join groups and leave groups and people even lead groups, but noone has any power. It has a very interesting vocabulary. So one part of the vocabulary is that instead of having rules for this society the society of alcoholics anonymous has things called traditions. Now traditions are not rules, traditions are ways that people have discovered of behaving together and which they're happy to go along with but they know they don't absolutely have to. They're not rules. So, what AA has done is to find a vocabulary which is not about imposing on other people. It respects the individuality and the right of everyone to say what they want in any way and so on... only providing that it doesn't take away someone else's freedoms. This society manages without having stars, without having governors, without any of those things. It just remains something that is made up by the individuals who choose to go together on occasions to share. They don't talk, they share things. If I talk to you I am forcing you to listen and I'm expecting you to do something. If I share something with you, I'm making an offer to you whether you listen or not. You can act or not, that's your choice. So it is a very extraordinary society. This is something that actually exists without control. It is the only example I know and it works very successfully.

What I wrote wasn't about alcoholics anonymous as a therapy but alcoholics anonymous as a body that manages to survive when we're expecting complete individuality on behalf of everyone. Not just respecting, [but also] expecting. What it requires is that there is a certain implied etiquette at alcoholics anonymous. One element is that you take responsibility for what you do and did. So if you look at the therapy of alcoholics anonymous it starts with a step which says we admitted, we were

powerless over alcohol. It says I admit I am powerless over alcohol. I cannot control it, I cannot live without it. So the first thing you do is you declare this. And the therapy stops by taking responsibility for alcoholism. And what we have stopped learning in this society is responsibility. That I'm responsible for what I do, that I'm responsible for what I ask for, that the world is not free.

It is probably my generation more than any other which is to blame for this because we lived and studied at a time when there was seemingly an unlimited supply of anything, including money, at least in the west. So, we sort of thought that we were somehow special. That we could do anything. And that is probably why we all became teachers not architects. Because in teaching you could keep at least some of the things that we thought were important going. I don't mean the crazyness of unlimited amounts of money and so on, but there are many projects that I designed back in the 1960s and early 1970s which are now beginning to be built. And this is not because I've told them about the projects that I did but it is because we as a group have remained these teachers and so those sorts of ideas have been retained for our students.

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT:

I don't think the job of a building is to particularly satisfy a set of needs, it is to create a set of opportunities or to set up situations in which people can make their own opportunities. An architect's job is only to lead something which is the starting point for others to begin to play with. So I see the making of architecture as the providing of opportunities for people to find ways for living that are interesting. Not necessarily the ways they already knew.

That is a completely different attitude to the functionalist attitude. And I think functionalism was a dead end that was terribly illconceived. Sure buildings have functions. You know you put drains in to get sewage out, you put a roof on to keep the weather out and so on and so of course buildings can have functions. But buildings also, and this is, I think, the key thing, provide opportunities for people, it is not a matter of giving people what they like. It is a matter of providing some opportunities that people can improvise to. I think that architecture's role is to provide opportunities for people to get more out of their life than they would get out of it without architecture being there.

So what we need to look for is the potential, not the solution. I have a Dutch friend called Gerald whom I worked with for many years and who taught me many things and many of them very good. And here is one of the very good ones: Gerald used to say that our job in solving problems for other people is always to leave another problem in the place of a problem we have solved. And the reason he said that is that what people like is to have problems to solve. They like things to tackle, it's good for them. They feel good if they are trying to deal with things which present challenges to them. And when they find a solution they feel clever. This is good, then they feel human and worthwhile. So what you need is to have a problem and not for them to be solved, but to have problems that you can engage yourself with, interest yourself with, and perhaps solve in order to find another problem. So if you're an architect and you like to solve people's problems you need to leave them with another problem that isn't solved. So they have something to do.

CYBERNETICS:

Cybernetics in general does not like to create hierarchies. So cybernetics—at least cybernetics of the sort that I'm interested in—sees the universe is flat not hierarchical and it sees hierarchy as something which we impose on the world. Its our way of making sense of something. So its more about the individual than society.

There are certain things, and I have arguments with quite a lot of people in cybernetics about language.

There are quite a lot of people for whom language is assumed and is sort of the millieux in which we live. And I don't agree with that, and I think it is uninteresting... Except in the following sense. So I'm not going to go through what I think language is. There is a point that a part of what language is, is a means for negotiating so that we believe the other has understood us. And there is a point where we get bored with establishing everything everytime we start doing this. So there is a point at which we say I am prepared to join a language club where I will pretend that meaning is not in my mind, that is in words. I think in ordinary language we give up a freedom to have words mean whatever we like and exchange it for the convenience that we get when we think that language enables us to communicate without having to all the time ask a lot of questions. So it is like joining a club—when you join a club there are some rules and what you do is you give up certain freedoms—you have to behave however you want in order to behave in the way that is decided that everyone will behave. So you give up the freedom—the individual freedom—in order to be able to communicate less precisely but more efficiently.

Chomsky's linguistics has not really worked for the last forty years—this is the transformative generative grammar. But people have made so many special cases, so many sections to the rules and so on that it still works in a sense. The trouble is you can't any longer really see the extraordinarily elegant and beautiful thing Chomsky produced with his transformational grammar. Which when you look at it, it's breathtaking in its sort of imagination and ability to do so. The fact that it does not quite do everything right is only to be expected—its a simplification. So, what we have instead of Chomsky's elegant structure is an entire forest of short stumpy trees and things which we can't walk through to find Chomsky's stuff in the middle. Interestingly, Chomsky stopped doing linguistics in the 1960s and became a politician—a political analyst and commentator.

Many people think cybernetics is all about control systems and sensors and all these things, I think cybernetics is about ways of thinking, about the way people understand the world... For me what is important about cybernetics is to emphasize certain things about how we can think about how we are in the world. Which gives us a certain control and certain power over this to make the world that is, what I would hope, better.

I think every time we come up with a great solution to something it has turned out to just make matters worse. Why don't we learn from this. We don't have great solutions, we have a way of looking at a world which allows us to see things differently and in ways which are really interesting. Which can possibly help us better towards each other. Which is what we need to do if we want to save the world.

SCIENTIFIC TRUTH:

Lets start with science and forget about data, which doesn't exist. I think it is a ridiculous word and information is almost as bad and has been totally abused by the scientific community and so by us. In the time of Newton, there is a wonderful section in a book, which is also published as a paper. It's called 'The science of simplification and the simplification of science'. It is by someone called Gerald M. Weinberg and in it he explains the way in which Newton produced a model which simplified our experience of the universe and left out almost everything until he had a model which was understandable by human beings. For instance, gravity, which explains why and how things fall. It is an explanatory principle. It is terribly clever. It is absolutely fantastic. It's a wonderful invention but it is an invention. It is a way of explaining things that we observe in the universe. Gravity is not a truth, gravity is an explanation. Science is full of these kinds of descriptions that are simplifications that we use, that we collect together, and that we build other descriptions of which are explanations that allow us to explain the world we find ourselves in or we believe ourselves to be in. But this is not a truth.

Science does not give us truth. Science gives us viable explanations. These explanations continue to be valid until they are found not to be valid. If there is one truth we learn from science it is that every

scientific truth in the end is proved not to be a truth. We no longer believe anything that we believed at the time of the Greeks. At least not in the same way. Democritus put forward the notion that there were atoms; he didn't mean this in the way we mean by it. Nor do we mean by atoms what Rutherford meant by atoms in 1900. These are all explanatory principles, they are amazing fantastic inventions of extraordinary human minds. But they are not true. The only thing we know about subatomic particles is that every time we think we have reached the end we find that we haven't. And that we only know as a matter of history. So it is not a fact; it is a historical precedent, which has continued to be the case until the moment. That does not mean to say it will always continue to be the case.

So in this sense this also attacks the Marxist view of history. History is not causal. History is a description of phenomena such that they make sense until they stop making sense and we have constantly rewritten history. Now, we may take a particular view of history and use it to act upon, to shape society or to shape individuals at particular moments. But that is different from saying that history in itself has a predictive and driving force. We can intervene in the mechanism of a causal history and change it and that is called a side-effect. And science is full of side-effects. And one of the sad things that we do not notice at the moment is that almost everything we do based on a so-called scientific truth has a consequence that was not predictive. So, we are always finding these things which were not predictive, which are side-effects. We also of course find that scientists do not behave in a way that Popper suggests—this is the impossibility of his romantic idealization. Because actually scientists want things to continue.

I don't think science knows what is right and I don't think that is the role of science. And I do not think we know what is right, what is correct, because we are always involved in our own observing. The world that we can experience cannot exist without our experience of it. That means there is no such thing as hardline objective knowledge. What it means is there is knowledge which you can share and agree on, but only until we find that it is wrong. That is a view of science that Karl Popper held. He had a book called “Conjectures and refutation”. In an ideal world where scientists are not being political—trying to win Nobel prizes, telling lies, having to satisfy universities with their absurd requirements and all the rest of it—in an ideal world a scientist is looking to put forward a conjecture which will be held true until it is refuted. And the job of science in this view is to question every bit of certain knowledge we think we have. Because if it is not so, it is knowledge that is waiting to be disproved. In this sense it is about the random. Random is not a real property—not a genuine property. Because you only know that in a random string—for instance, a string of numbers—you know nobody has yet found a path. But you don't know that there is no path.

POST-SCIENTIFIC TRUTH:

I'm rather tired of amazing solutions that seem to solve nothing very much. And this happens in philosophical theory every ten years or so, it happens in the latest scientific fashion which has a life of about 5 years. I have no idea if big data is in any sense interesting. I mean, to talk about meta data, where should we begin? Making records? There is nothing new about meta data. The ability to handle enormous conglomerations of data, it may be helpful, it may be useful, but for me the problem with this is that all those ways of handling things take away exactly the detail that makes the individual different and distinct. I think that when you stop understanding that each individual is different and distinct you end up with the possibility of making outrageous generalizations. You stop recognizing the inherent and unique distinctiveness and individuality of each of the individuals. And that, for me, is the basis of being in the world, that we are uniquely different.

Anyhow, I think these models generate possibilities. If you allow them to control your behaviour, it is your choice. But what they are actually doing is they are generating alternatives to the things we have done in the past. I don't think things are in and out themselves dangerous. What is dangerous is what we do with them.

ARCHITECT:

Architects are very good at finding ways of being employed. In the training of an architect, there is the bit which is about building and there is the rest of it. And the rest of it seems to be a very good general education. I was in an architecture school and I could do a doctorate in cybernetics having never done a bachelor's degree. So that was because I had a very good general education as an architect.

PUBLIC SPACE:

I think it is very rare that architects create public space. Occasionally people do, Hausmann did if you want to call him an architect. Occasionally, we get to design a public space but most public spaces consist of mere people and you know someone happens to add the last one as it were and then within a time a new one will get put up. But what makes it public is the choice of the public to be there, not the architecture and not the architect. The architects do not even do the public space, they just happen to build things around it...

AUTHENTIC ENVIRONMENTS:

What sort of experience isn't authentic? I think all our experiences are by definition authentic and by definition it is personal. I believe that we live in our experience and we make of our experience what we make of it. And we relate it to reality as we choose to relate it to reality. I include saying there is no reality. And I think the question about digital personalization of environments is underestimating what we intrinsically bring and contribute to the environment we live in. I have no idea what google glasses are going to do. And I think that is probably one of the least interesting things I've heard of recently. And I really do wonder if I need to walk around seeing the New York stock exchange and that sort of thing in front of my eyes all the time.

INTERACTIVITY:

Almost no interactive architecture is actually interactive, it's responsive. For it to be really interactive it should be intelligent enough to be able to surprise you. I know people are intelligent, because they surprise me, because they don't do what I want. But they do things, sometimes things that I didn't know I wanted. But now that they've done that, I do want them. And sometimes things I don't want. So, for instance... I have friends who know lots of good restaurants and if I always choose the restaurant I will never learn about these other good restaurants, so by not being in charge but letting them show their intelligence I can discover all sorts of new restaurants. So if I'm talking about intelligent architecture, that's what I'm looking for. I'm looking for an architecture which... when I go out to work one day decides to completely rebuild itself somehow. To completely move things around. Not let me in for a night but tell me to go to a hotel, whatever it is. I'm looking for something that interacts with me not in the role of a slave but in the role of an equal.

I think you can have random things, which is basically what happens and generates them. And I think that being disturbed is value. What I mean is that I don't want things that are always serving me what I want. I want to be surprised, I want the random to come into my life. I want to be shaken off by things, I want to have experiences that shock me because only by doing these things can I remain really alive myself. Now, not everyone wants this, and not everyone should have it, but that is my response to this question about an architecture which changes. It depends on what you want from this architecture.

ILLUSION/REALITY:

I have an enormous problem with the notion of illusion. I used to have a friend called Richard L Gregory who was a very well known visual psychologist. And Richard spent his life studying visual

illusions; he was very interested in them, and his explanation for this was that when you study illusions, you learn about the true nature of the real way things work. Because what you're learning about is your limits and you're having to guess when you're not sure and you're making the wrong decisions for all sorts of reasons. The notion of an illusion is related to knowing what is right. You don't have an illusion unless you know what is right.

For me the most trivial of all academic subjects that I know of is semiotics. So I have no interest in that area. I don't talk about meaning and things, I don't talk about signs and so on...You can say it is a great weakness and perhaps it is, especially in Estonia where you have a good tradition of semiology and semiotics. But for me it remains an approach which is far too close to symbolism. Or falls into symbolism far too often and I don't know or understand how someone like Carl Gustav Jung can claim that there are universal symbols. All of those sorts of things are about the truth which lies outside you. All of those things have a reference to the 'real world'. And I don't believe in that real world. I don't know if there is any such thing as a real world. Because, the real world usually means a world which is separate from me and how can I know about it if it is separate from me. It is a nonsense.

I can choose to believe there is a real world and I think that is pretty convenient most of the time. But sometimes I prefer to behave as if there is not a real world because it is what I like to do. If I want to have a wonderful dream I will do that. Sometimes in order to find new ways of thinking about problems I need to detach myself from the many concerns of the real world. So, it is a matter of position—it is a matter that goes back to the difference between sociology and psychology, society and the individual. And I'm interested in the difference between individuals. That's what I like, that is what I find personally interesting in my life is to meet people who don't think like me, people who have things to tell me that I didn't know already. I'm not much interested in the stuff I know already, I know that. Why should I hear that again..?

YOUTH:

Well, I think that it was not that Archigram directly influenced me. I didn't go and try to design a walking city or a crawling city or anything like that, and none of the Archigram people ever taught me. But there was a *zeitgeist* and Archigram was part of it and Cedric was part of it and Archizoom was part of it. And what were they called... Superstudio and all those guys were all part of it, Bucky Fuller was part of it... It was an amazing moment—there were incredible people around, there was astonishing energy... There was a belief in the future, there was a belief that everything was possible. There was a belief in young people. So, of course young people always know that they're the best and they know everything and the old people don't know anything but we believed that more than most generations and we had more reason to; because there was a change in culture. There was pop music, and there was all that really ridiculous way of dressing. There was sex. There was extreme personalization of things in certain senses. And the money that we had was totally different, the making of new things, for instance the mini, was an extraordinary move against the traditional car, it looked quite unlike anything and it worked unlike anything... the engine was the wrong way round... all sorts of things. Suddenly there was an openness to new ideas.

I was interested in conceptualising technology. I was interested in ways of thinking. And really wild dreams, ephemeralizing the world. I designed something that looks pretty much like internet shopping in 1967... I designed something which looks like mobile phone networks in 1970... I designed the desk of the laptop computer in 1970...

I never really wanted to become an architect. What I was doing was too abstract, too ephemeral, too without the form of a building. When I designed the internet shopping, it was a response to my 3rd year project in the Architectural Association School of Architecture to design a supermarket. And I objected to the supermarket, so I designed a remote shopping system; and I was told, even as I've

done, that I have to design a showroom or something for my remote shopping centre. So they could not understand that it didn't need a showroom. So I designed this dadaist building which had an elevation made of the plastic casts of local houses to stick up. And it was drawn using felt-tip pen in bright colours over lines drawn using a 5b pencil. So they were really messy drawings. And I planned it by throwing dots across the room. It had nothing to do with what I was doing. My tutor at that time, lord Richard Rogers of Riverside, looked at what I was doing and he said it doesn't matter. He said ‘compared to the cost of the computing you're talking about, you could build your building in solid gold.’

It was through that scheme that I met Gordon Pask and it was through that scheme I became interested in cybernetics. Until then I had never heard of cybernetics. I had been slightly interested in Cedric Price because I thought the way he taught was so extraordinary. He was the only person I met as a student who came anywhere near Gordon Pask and perhaps even passed his ability to think. And to think with an extraordinary perception and clarity. I mean just mindblowing, just extraordinary, astonishing, wonderful.

And actually, you talked about Clive Sinclair. Sinclair was interesting at that time. He produced the first calculator I had which I had to solder together, and when it didn't work I had to send it off to Sinclair, where they sent me back one which did work and reports on my soldering. And that time Sinclair's office was a big warehouse near Cambridge and the top floor was devoted to pinball machines and things like that because the wacky inventors that inhabited the building they were allowed to play because play was good for inventing. The only condition was that if they had a good idea they should go downstairs and work on it. That was an extraordinary time, you cannot see that happening nowadays. The counters are everywhere – how do you know that is effective, how much time did you spend writing reports, you know all that sort of stuff. We've lost that and for the younger generation this is an enormous loss. We live in a world of accountants and insurance agents. And the things that we appear to value and that control our lives are accountancy and insurance consultants and measures... And they are dreadful. So I keep on being a teacher and I have the best teaching job in the world because for the last 20 years I haven't had to do the paperwork and be counted by the accountants and the insurance agents, because I'm never anywhere long enough for anyone to want to waste time doing that sort of thing.

Extracts from the interview with Ranulph Glanville by Johanna Jõekalda
Held on March 3rd 2014 on Skype